

Elizabeth Dole

1936–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

REPUBLICAN FROM NORTH CAROLINA

2003–



Congressional Pictorial Directory
109th Congress

ELECTED IN 2002 AS THE FIRST WOMAN SENATOR FROM North Carolina, Elizabeth Dole has one of the most impressive public service careers of any American elected official. Her role as a Cabinet officer for two Presidents, her own bid for the Republican nomination for President in 2000, and her campaign work for her husband, former Senator Bob Dole, give Senator Elizabeth Dole a deep reserve of political experience to bring to her freshman term.

Mary Elizabeth Hanford was born on July 29, 1936, in Salisbury, North Carolina, to John Van Hanford, a flower wholesaler, and Mary Ella Cathey Hanford. In 1958, Hanford earned a B.A. from Duke University in political science. In the summer of 1959, she studied British history at Oxford University. Hanford subsequently moved to Boston and earned an M.A. from Harvard University in education and government in 1960. She completed a Harvard law degree in 1965, one of only 24 women in a class of 550.

After graduation, Elizabeth Hanford was drawn to the nation's capital, claiming "Washington was like a magnet."¹ In more than 30 years in the capital, she accumulated a formidable political résumé. Her first involvement in national politics was serving as the White House consumer affairs aide for President Richard Nixon. While serving as a consumer advocate for the Federal Trade Commission, Elizabeth Hanford met Kansas Senator Bob Dole, whom she married in 1975.² In 1981, President Ronald W. Reagan named her an assistant for the public liaison. From 1983 to 1987, Dole was the first woman to serve as Transportation Secretary.³ Increased safety was her priority, promoting measures such as a third rear-brake light and airbags in all vehicles, as well as raising the drinking age to 21 years. In 1989, President George H.W. Bush named Dole as his Labor Secretary.

In 1991, Dole left her Cabinet position to become the president of the American Red Cross. During her first year at the helm of the nonprofit organization, she accepted no salary, and she improved the organization's financial health through corporate fundraising.⁴ Elizabeth Dole also gained valuable political experience campaigning for her husband during his bids for Vice President in 1976 and for President in 1980, 1988, and 1996. She eventually sought the Republican nomination for President for herself and, before exiting the race in October 1999, was considered the first serious woman contender for the nomination in U.S. history.⁵

When longtime incumbent North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms announced his retirement in 2002, Elizabeth Dole decided to seek his seat in the U.S. Senate. Dole easily won the GOP primary, taking 80 percent of the vote against six opponents. She faced Democratic nominee Erskine Bowles in a hard-fought general election. She ran on a platform dubbed the "Dole Plan," which promoted new jobs in the economically depressed region. In a proposal inherited from Helms, both Dole and Bowles supported a tobacco buyout plan, that put money from the 15 percent tobacco tax towards paying producers more per pound. Dole's strength proved to be statewide, as she defeated Bowles with 53 percent of the total, garnering votes in both the coastal and the mountainous regions.⁶ She received the highest percentage for any of the state's Senate candidates since 1978.

Upon her election, Senator Dole's long political service afforded her some important committee assignments. She serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Dole also sits on the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee—an important seat to her constituents, since Charlotte, North Carolina, continues to evolve as a financial hub. She also serves on the Select Committee on Aging. Her legislative agenda has reflected her background, particularly her humanitarian work. Nutrition and hunger are specific concerns, as Dole introduced a joint resolution recognizing hunger as a worldwide problem, provided legislation that expands eligibility for subsidized school lunches, and submitted a bill to provide tax benefits to trucking companies transporting food to distribution centers.⁷ Her attention to her North Carolina constituents is reflected in the successful passage of the tobacco buyout program, accomplishing one of her biggest campaign promises. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), Senator Dole serves as chairwoman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Elizabeth Hanford Dole," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

Dole, Elizabeth, and Bob Dole. *Unlimited Partners: Our American Story*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

NOTES

1 *Current Biography*, 1983 (New York: H.W. Wilson and Company, 1983): 117.

2 *Current Biography*, 1997 (New York: H.W. Wilson and Company, 1997): 146.

3 Quoted in *Current Biography*, 1983: 119.

4 *Current Biography*, 1997: 148.

5 *Politics in America*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 744–745

6 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>; John Morrill and Mark Johnson, "Dole Beats Bowles to Take Helms' Seat in the U.S. Senate," 6 November 2002, *Charlotte Observer*: 1.

7 These measures were introduced in the 108th Congress. See S. Con. Res. 114, S. 1549, and S. 2494.